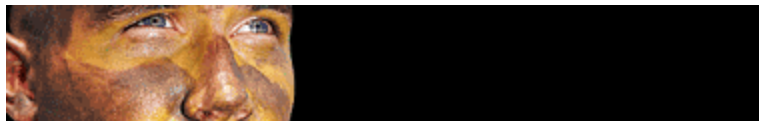




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The "Eagle of the Sea" Lands Marines in Kuwait

By Journalist 2nd Class Crystal King and Chief Journalist William Polson, USS Tarawa Public Affairs Navy Newsstand

ABOARD USS TARAWA, At Sea (NNS), February 24, 2003 -- USS Tarawa (LHA 1) arrived off the coast of Kuwait in the North Arabian Gulf recently, adding approximately 4,000 more Sailors and Marines to the rapidly growing American force in the region.

Accompanying the San Diego-based amphibious assault ship are the dock landing ship USS Rushmore (LSD 47) and the amphibious transport dock ship USS Duluth (LPD 6), the other two ships composing the Tarawa Amphibious Ready Group (ARG).

"Our purpose here is to deliver the Marines to their destination and support amphibious operations during Operation Enduring Freedom," said Tarawa's Commanding Officer, Capt. Jay Bowling. "This is a culmination of my 26 years in the Navy, and it feels great to do something that I've trained to do."

The Tarawa ARG's presence off the coast of Kuwait comes as part of a six-month deployment to the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf. After leaving San Diego Jan. 6, the three ships steamed west for nine weeks before arriving off Kuwait to expedite the landing of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).

"The ship's engines have been steaming right along," said Machinist's Mate 1st Class Douglas Scholl, one of Tarawa's machinery room's supervisors. "This is a testament to just how hard these Sailors work down here to keep this ship moving through the water."

Probably the most difficult part of the journey was the transit through the Strait of Hormuz, the entrance to the Arabian Gulf.

Lt. j.g. Jacquelyn Hayes, who was standing watch as officer of the deck at the time, said, "It was mostly nerve racking, and we expected a lot of traffic. We're in the Gulf now, and it's not like being off the coast of San Diego in friendly waters."





During the transit, the Tarawa ARG received help from escorts in the sea and air, including the San Diego-based guided missile frigate USS Thach (FFG 43) and accompanying patrol aircraft, to make a safe passage. Despite some intense moments, the three ships of the Tarawa ARG and the high-endurance Coast Guard cutter, USCGC Boutwell (WHEC 719), made it through without incident.

Cmdr. Thomas Hegarty, Tarawa's operations officer, said the Tarawa ARG had gone to great lengths to be in the right place at the right time. "We're ready to do whatever the president asks."

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